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Interview with Jerry Rubin

Jerry Rubin

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**LOUISE PETTUS ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview #229
RUBIN, Jerry**

RUBIN, Jerry

Former '60s radical, entrepreneur

Interviewed: undated

Interviewer: Ron Chepesiuk

Index by: Alyssa Jones

Length: 1 hour, 11 minutes, 56 seconds

Abstract: In his interview with Ron Chepesiuk, Jerry Rubin discussed his time as a '60s radical and how those experiences aided in his career. Rubin covered topic of multilevel marketing, entrepreneurship, networking, Yuppies, protests, self-reliance, and journalism. He also discussed other activists such as Abby Hoffman, Paul Krassner, and Anita Hoffman, along with CIA conspiracies, Hippies and Diggers, Groucho Marx, and the counterculture. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Multilevel marketing, entrepreneurship, networking, Yuppies, pyramid scheme, anti-fallout shelter protests, race, self-reliance, Ché Guevara, journalism, holistic, vitamins and health supplements, socialism, Vietnam War, Cuba, Civil Rights Movement, economic inequality, male chauvinism, Abby Hoffman, Paul Krassner, Anita Hoffman, CIA conspiracies, Hippies and Diggers, Groucho Marx, Bill Clinton, Ross Perot, marijuana

Interview Session (undated): Digital File

Time	Keywords
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00:00:00	<i>Start of Interview</i> /Interviewer's Introduction
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00:00:02	<i>Question:</i> The last time I saw you, you were in New York, now you're on the other side of the country in L.A. What happened? <i>Answer:</i> JR said the police ran him out of the city.
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00:00:22	<i>Question:</i> Those days are gone, Jerry. <i>Answer:</i> JR said it was a voluntary move and called California a visionary state. JR thought L.A. was a better fit for him.
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00:01:03	<i>Question:</i> You needed a change. <i>Answer:</i> It was not an unusual move for JR, all his life he'd moved between New York and California. JR tried to go to California at the beginning of every decade.
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- 00:04:22 *Question:* You were networking. You had a networking organization when I saw you in New York, bringing people together? *Answer:* Yes, but JR stopped doing that at the end of the 1980s. He then got involved in a boom industry of the 1990s, multilevel marketing. Multilevel marketing was a business in which people made a commission based on the number of individuals taught to create their own businesses. JR described it as entrepreneurs teaching entrepreneurs how to be entrepreneurs. It was like socialistic capitalism because people were working together and helping each other. JR saw it as a good fit for him after his networking company fell apart.
- 00:05:37 *Question:* It fell apart? *Answer:* It fell apart because of social trends. People were staying at home more and the crash/boom of the Yuppies was a great social force.
- 00:06:03 *Question:* You said it was controversial. You've also been accused of working a pyramid scheme. Is there a suit against you? *Answer:* JR called it a silly and frivolous lawsuit. The man who sued JR had nothing to do with him; it was just a way for a law firm to get publicity by blackmailing a famous person. JR admitted that there were pyramid schemes in MLM. When there is not a legitimate product and people are just moving money around, that is when a pyramid scheme occurs. To JR, all businesses within MLM were pyramids, and those at the bottoms of the pyramids were people who had not started their own businesses.
- 00:08:28 *Question:* Can people make money? That's the point. Is there risk involved? RC did not think it was possible for everyone involved in the pyramid to make money. *Answer:* JR said that everyone could make money, but they had to work hard, although he at first answered with "no". JR said the opportunity was there.
- 00:10:07 *Question:* Your critics have said that you sell "horse feathers"; they say that your products aren't that good. *Answer:* JR said that he supported critics because he was also a critic. JR's company was selling vitamins and supplements and thought that in ten years, people who did not take vitamins would be looked at as if they were insane.
- 00:11:46 *Question:* You have control of your genes? *Answer:* No, but JR said that people had control over everything else. He said he was one of the healthiest people in the world.
- 00:12:12 *Question:* Are you happy? *Answer:* Deliriously so.
- 00:12:22 *Question:* Is that sarcasm or are you serious? *Answer:* Totally serious.
- 00:12:30 *Question:* You enjoy your lifestyle? *Answer:* Love it. JR said he would have to be crazy not to because you have to create your own environment.
- 00:15:32 *Question:* You're talking about a holistic approach? *Answer:* JR said he was talking

- about teaching people to take care of themselves. JR thought that if doctors were paid when patients were healthy, then doctors would prescribe JR's products non-stop.
- 00:15:54 *Question:* I read your letter to the editor in which you said it was the "freedom decade" and that people-to-people marketing was going to be the vehicle for personal freedom. Could you explain what you meant by that? *Answer:* JR thought that people had to save the economy, rather than the government saving the economy. People would save the economy by becoming self-reliant in business. Self-reliance was the most revolutionary and radical idea to JR. Business self-reliance: responsible for your own financial security. Your job, your boss, and the government did not give you security. Most people limited themselves in health and in business.
- 00:18:06 *Question:* You weren't living a healthy life in the 1960s, right? You were too young and didn't care? *Answer:* Right. JR said that people that young felt invincible.
- 00:18:20 *Question:* How did you feel when the 1960s ended? *Answer:* When the '60s ended, JR realized that he was going to live a long life and should live a healthy one.
- 00:18:57 *Question:* Are you a millionaire? *Answer:* No. JR's business was worth a million dollars. JR and RC briefly discussed JR's financial history, including his loss during the financial crash of 1989. JR went on to discuss his business of teaching people to be entrepreneurs.
- 00:23:30 *Question:* And you're going to implement this? *Answer:* No, JR was going to promote it.
- 00:23:57 *Question:* Is it going to end poverty? Solve the environmental problem? *Answer:* It had the potential to do both.
- 00:24:40 **[no question]** Must teach self-reliance, but that did not mean we could not help those who were down on their luck or in need. America needed a reawakening of personal dreams.
- 00:26:13 *Question:* In terms of self-reliance in the '60s, you went against the grain. Today, your former colleagues say you sold out, but you always seem to follow your own path, right? Because of self-reliance. *Answer:* Everyone has a different personality and they all fit together differently.
- 00:28:11 *Question:* We talked about your background-were you always self-reliant or did you try to fit in? *Answer:* Yes and no. JR was a rebellious, typical child. His parents called him a rebel, but he would not consider himself a rebel.

- 00:28:58 **[no question]** JR found himself adapting to those around him.
- 00:29:05 *Question:* When did you become politically aware? *Answer:* As a child JR noticed a difference between Blacks and Whites. JR grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio.
- 00:29:17 *Question:* In Cincinnati? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:29:20 *Question:* How did you react? *Answer:* JR thought it was wrong.
- 00:30:14 *Question:* What did you do while protesting? *Answer:* JR passed out anti-fallout shelter flyers.
- 00:30:22 *Question:* By yourself? *Answer:* No. JR went with two friends.
- 00:30:38 *Question:* You met Ché Guevara? *Answer:* Yes, at the time JR wanted to be a journalist. He saw journalism as a way out of the boredom of life. Growing up in Cincinnati, JR became a journalistic in high school. He worked for the school and city papers. JR even interviewed Jack Kennedy when he came to town.
- 00:31:49 *Question:* What kind of questions did you ask him? *Answer:* All the college kids asked him questions. JR liked to be where the action was.
- 00:32:32 *Question:* Is that where your tremendous sense of how to use the media came from? *Answer:* Yes. JR said he was a journalist so he knew where the stories were. He knew what made news and what made people interested, which made him a good political activist, a good marketer, and good at exciting the media.
- 00:33:19 *Question:* That helped you later on, as you said. You led a pretty normal childhood, but then you went away to college. You went to San Francisco. *Answer:* No, JR went to University of Cincinnati.
- 00:33:36 *Question:* What did you do there? *Answer:* JR was a journalist.
- 00:33:39 *Question:* And you worked as a reporter for whom? *Answer:* *The Cincinnati Star.*
- 00:33:45 *Question:* What kind of stories did you cover? *Answer:* Baseball, sports, everything in the late 1950s.
- 00:34:01 *Question:* And then you went to graduate school at Berkeley. *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:34:08 *Question:* Why did you choose Berkeley? Was it a liberal haven at that time? *Answer:* Yes. His parents had died and JR had become guardian of his 9 year-old brother.

- 00:34:24 *Question:* Your parents died in the '40s, you said? *Answer:* In their 40s.
- 00:34:29 *Question:* That was a lot of responsibility. *Answer:* Yes. JR went to Berkeley because he wanted to go to the hotbed of political activism.
- 00:34:51 *Question:* That was before the Free Speech Movement. *Answer:* Yes. JR went to Berkeley about a year before the Free Speech Movement.
- 00:34:57 *Question:* What were the issues that you were interested in? *Answer:* JR was most concerned with economic equality in the country.
- 00:35:11 *Question:* Right, the Civil Rights Movement was gaining momentum. *Answer:* JR believed that all the other issues branched from the economic inequality of the country.
- 00:35:56 *Question:* Berkeley must have been an exciting place. *Answer:* Yes. Have you read my book, *Do It?* You should get it and quote from it.
- 00:36:25 *Question:* It was an exciting period for you, right? *Answer:* Yes, it was a period of anything going, politically. There was hope to change America.
- 00:36:40 *Question:* Were you a leader at that time? *Answer:* Not in the beginning, JR was more of an observer. Only after he came back from Cuba did he become a catalyst, leading people to take aggressive action against the Vietnam War.
- 00:37:12 *Question:* You were upset about Vietnam before it became a big movement. How did you become aware of Vietnam as an issue? *Answer:* It showed him what mass action could do.
- 00:38:22 *Question:* Is this where your idea as the guerilla theater first developed? *Answer:* No, the Free Speech Movement was the theater. JR saw life as theater, so guerilla theater was only natural.
- 00:39:48 *Question:* When did you meet the Hell's Angels? What happened? Where was this? *Answer:* A brawl broke out and it was in Oakland. Protest was American.
- 00:40:24 *Question:* Even though your colleagues thought you were making a bad move by doing that, right, especially the Progressive Labor Party and the communists? *Answer:* Yes. They protested in their own way, but most people were against it.
- 00:40:49 *Question:* A lot of people in the movement disagreed with you in terms of the spotlight. *Answer:* Not at that point.

- 00:41:12 *Question:* Can you recall when you first met Abby? *Answer:* Yes, when they were organizing a march on the Pentagon. Abby was a well-known Hippy/Digger in California and NY and JR said he wanted to meet Abby, so he did.
- 00:41:51 *Question:* How much influence did you have on him and vice-versa? *Answer:* JR thought they had a huge influence on each other, but it was a good influence. JR influenced Abby to expand his street politics to a world scene and Abby helped JR see that there were other ways to a revolution.
- 00:42:14 *Question:* You fed off each other's energy? *Answer:* Yes. They were a good balance.
- 00:42:20 *Question:* He never really changed over the years. The fact that you became more of a capitalist and less of a traditional social revolutionary, how did that affect your relationship with him over the years? *Answer:* It caused some conflict, but their friendship was deeper than their conflicts. At least, that is what JR believed, despite the conflicts sometimes seeming greater than the friendship.
- 00:42:51 *Question:* Were you surprised by his death? Did you initially believe it was suicide? *Answer:* Yes. He was a manic-depressive, had his down days, and had drama.
- 00:43:06 *Question:* That's interesting because Anita Hoffman did not realize that Abby was manic-depressive before he went underground. *Answer:* In the '60s, you could hide your manic-depression because it was a manic decade. Abby would do things that were considered normal abnormal behavior for the '60s.
- 00:43:33 *Question:* Dellinger thought that the CIA was involved in some way, but there's no question that it was a suicide. *Answer:* Not in JR's mind. Dave Dellinger believed the CIA was involved?
- 00:43:50 *Question:* Yes, but he modified his take, but he still believes that the whole story hadn't come out yet. Dellinger still believed that there was some connection with the CIA. *Answer:* JR said he would feel like an asshole if that were true because he should have been defending his friend against the CIA, but he did not believe it.
- 00:44:30 *Question:* Anita believed that it was suicide, along with Krassner and everyone else. You were going to write a biography about Abby, weren't you? *Answer:* When Abby died, JR had the thought because he thought he knew him as well as anyone and appreciated Abby while being aware of his humanity. However, the book was blocked by Abby's brother and other people. JR considered himself to be a forward thinking person and that backtracking to write Abby's biography would not have been moving forward.

- 00:45:25 *Question:* You don't get nostalgic for the '60s? *Answer:* JR tried not to be nostalgic about anything.
- 00:45:35 *Question:* You had good friends. Are they the same friends? *Answer:* Some are the same, some are different.
- 00:45:48 *Question:* How would you place Abby in history? *Answer:* JR considered Abby one of the greatest rebels of America. He needed to be seen as the Groucho Marx of American politics, and thought he would become more significant as time went on. JR said Abby was one of the most free spirits to ever live in this country.
- 00:46:22 *Question:* Have you thought of yourself? *Answer:* No, JR didn't think anyone thought of themselves that way.
- 00:46:30 *Question:* Some of the ladies that I've interviewed talking about chauvinism in the movement were you aware of this? *Answer:* Not during the movement, but JR became aware of it after the movement.
- 00:46:53 *Question:* How did you do that? *Answer:* A woman put the idea out to him, obviously. During the movement it seemed natural and they all adopted the chauvinism of society.
- 00:47:07 *Question:* What about your views today? *Answer:* JR was not a feminist, but supported women's liberation and feminist causes. The basic economic ones, but JR was fairly conservative sexually.
- 00:47:43 *Question:* Yes, I read that you had one girlfriend all through the '60s. *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:47:55 *Question:* The last time I talked to you, you were married. I just heard that you were divorced. *Answer:* Yes. Life goes on.
- 00:48:10 *Question:* What about the drug scene? Were you heavily involved? *Answer:* JR said that he was the typical chain marijuana smoker. Nothing more than that.
- 00:48:19 *Question:* How about acid? *Answer:* Occasionally, once every six months; twice a year, around the holidays, special occasions. JR loved it, it opened up his mind.
- 00:48:40 *Question:* Are you in favor of legalization? *Answer:* JR was in favor of legalization of marijuana. JR said you have to be careful when you get beyond marijuana.
- 00:49:27 *Question:* Some say the libertine attitude with drugs in the '60s created a climate that led to stronger and stronger drugs. *Answer:* JR could see the argument, but did not necessarily agree with it.

- 00:50:15 *Question:* The war on drugs is phony when you have petrol companies supplying the ingredients for cocaine. *Answer:* JR didn't really answer that statement after RC said that the news hadn't come out yet, but RC read an article about it.
- 00:50:32 *Question:* It's actually a dangerous time to be doing marijuana. *Answer:* JR was not aware of it being a dangerous time for marijuana users.
- 00:50:50 *Question:* You can go to jail now. *Answer:* Really? JR had no idea.
- 00:50:53 *Question:* I don't know what the laws are in California, but in South Carolina, you can go to jail for a year. *Answer:* In South Carolina?
- 00:51:04 *Question:* Yeah. *Answer:* Stay away from South Carolina.
- 00:51:20 *Question:* What about the entrepreneurship aspect of it? You were an entrepreneur in the '60s and that gave you the training. *Answer:* JR believed it to be a political entrepreneurship. The goal was not money. Political activity was the goal. It was like MLM, one person told another, told another, told another.
- 00:51:42 *Question:* That experience has helped you? *Answer:* Yes, JR used the same skills in the 1960s as he did while he was working.
- 00:51:54 *Question:* How would you sum up the legacy of the '60s? *Answer:* JR thought the legacy of the '60s would be determined in the '90s.
- 00:52:03 *Question:* Like a rebirth. *Answer:* No, JR thought the generation of the '60s would infiltrate the system and transform the system from within in the '90s.
- 00:52:11 *Question:* They said that in the '80s, too. *Answer:* But in the '90s, we took over. "The '60s are now in power" and that the president after Clinton would be even more '60s.
- 00:52:29 *Question:* When you think back to that period, do you ever get embarrassed by anything you did? *Answer:* No. JR joked that he should have invested in real estate.
- 00:52:48 *Question:* But you weren't into money in those days. *Answer:* Right. JR said that money is a tool for positive things and that he did not realize that in the '60s.
- 00:52:56 *Question:* So you do regret the fact that you weren't more materialistic in the '60s. *Answer:* No, not materialistic, but he could have invested in real estate and let it sit there and used it the present.

- 00:53:08 *Question:* You're not serious. *Answer:* JR said he was serious. He was still against money until the early '80s.
- 00:53:24 *Question:* So, that's your regret, right? *Answer:* Yes. JR offered some tapes to RC. They discussed how reliable RC was because JR needed them back. JR discussed the content of the video tapes.
- 00:56:29 *Question:* What year was this? *Answer:* Early '80s. JR claimed to have predicted the Clinton election.
- 00:56:35 *Question:* Are you happy with the election? *Answer:* Yes. JR was for Ross Perot.
- 00:56:40 *Question:* Why were you for Ross Perot? *Answer:* JR thought Perot had a good program, which was good because Clinton was adopting Perot's program.
- 00:56:56 *Question:* That's right. Is that your example of people of the '60s taking over? *Answer:* No, JR considered Clinton as a straight guy during the '60s.
- 00:57:56 *Question:* Can you respect that? *Answer:* JR said he had to respect him. JR was glad Clinton was president.
- 00:58:10 *Question:* And your future is multilevel marketing? *Answer:* Yes.
- 00:58:28 *Question:* Money is the key to happiness? *Answer:* No, but money is a tool needed to get the key to happiness.
- 00:58:42 *Question:* Is this [possibly JR's apartment] important to you? *Answer:* No, but it was comfortable.
- 00:59:14 *Question:* If I wanted to join your business, what would I have to do? *Answer:* Take the products, experience the products, and then start talking about the products.
- 00:59:24 *Question:* How much initial investment? *Answer:* \$20.00.
- 00:59:27 *Question:* You're kidding. *Answer:* Nope, and then whatever products you want to buy.
- 00:59:33 *Question:* Average first batch price? *Answer:* Anywhere from \$100 to \$300.
- 00:59:47 *Question:* There are people in South Carolina? *Answer:* JR said there weren't many that he knew of.
- 00:59:55 *Question:* But it's going to spread, right? *Answer:* Yes.

- 00:59:58 *Question:* This lawsuit doesn't have any impact on you? *Answer:* No.
- 01:00:05 *Question:* But it made a big splash. *Answer:* "Because I'm Jerry Rubin." JR said it was a bigger splash in RC's mind than it made in reality.
- 01:00:27 *Question:* Is it going to hurt business? *Answer:* No.
- 01:00:40 *Question:* What's your relationship to the company? *Answer:* JR said he was the distributor.
- 01:00:44 *Question:* How many distributors are there? *Answer:* Maybe 30,000.
- 01:00:46 *Question:* So, you're just one of the workers. *Answer:* Right, JR said that he wasn't an owner.
- 01:01:06 *Question:* You could be your own boss? *Answer:* JR said he was already his own boss.
- 01:01:09 *Question:* Oh, yeah? *Answer:* Yes, everyone in multilevel marketing was their own boss, according to JR.
- 01:01:15 *Question:* In what article, it said that you pulled off a \$600,000 deal. Is that true? *Answer:* No.
- 01:01:21 *Question:* It was in *LA Times*. *Answer:* JR was not aware of it.
- 01:01:31 *Question:* You made a couple of phone calls and you pulled off a \$600,000 deal? *Answer:* No.
- 01:01:40 *Question:* I thought you read everything about yourself. *Answer:* JR still did not remember the article. RC continued to look for the article in his folder of files.
- 01:05:57 *Question:* You don't write much anymore, do you? *Answer:* Not really.
- 01:06:02 *Question:* Is that because you're so busy? *Answer:* Too busy, yes.
- 01:06:05 *Question:* Do you miss it? *Answer:* No.
- 01:06:13 *Question:* You're people-oriented. *Answer:* Yes.
- 01:07:00 **[no question]** JR found the article, but it was talking about another Jerry Rubin.

- 01:07:19 *Question:* But you don't get involved with social causes anymore, right? *Answer:* JR did not answer the question. He was distracted by another article about marijuana.
- 01:07:47 *Question:* Does it bother you that you were booed at Hoffman's funeral? *Answer:* JR said that he wasn't booed at the funeral.
- 01:07:56 *Question:* That's what they said in an article. *Answer:* JR said he didn't care about any articles, but asked what article.
- 01:07:57 *Question:* It was Krassner; he was describing the funeral for *The Nation* or something. He said it was the first time anyone was ever booed at a funeral. *Answer:* JR said Krassner did not attend the funeral and said that the information was totally false.
- 01:08:40 *Question:* He said that you got a \$400,000 advance, in the article, to do the book. Is that true? *Answer:* Yes, but JR never received the advance.
- 01:09:03 *Question:* Why didn't you do your own book on him? *Answer:* JR said he didn't feel like it.
- 01:09:08 *Question:* It would have been more interesting to write your own book. *Answer:* JR did not want to write a book about Hoffman. JR continued to find articles that were of another Jerry Rubin. JR told RC not to repeat the lies of the Hoffman funeral article.
- 01:09:30 *Question:* Now it's on the record because I asked you. *Answer:* JR said he didn't care about the article.
- 01:10:10 *Question:* Do you have any file photos I can use? *Answer:* No, JR said he wasn't in the PR business. JR and RC continued talking about trading articles and tapes. JR offered to send RC a press packet.
- 01:10:55 *Question:* That's what I need. Can you do that? *Answer:* JR said he didn't have a press photo, just a press packet. RC decided to take some photographs of JR.
- 01:11:56 ***End of interview***